

Lights on the Surface

We were cruising at 10,000 feet, flying a Navy R5D four-engine transport plane from Keflavik, Iceland to Argentia, Newfoundland. I was in the left seat, getting a route check in order to qualify as a Plane Commander on this type of airplane. The autopilot was engaged. All was proceeding normally.

The weather was clear, with excellent visibility. A few patches of thin, transparent scattered clouds could be seen well below us, with tops at perhaps 2,000 feet. We were bucking a strong 60 knot headwind.

Lieutenant Fred Kingdon was sitting in the right seat. In the cabin was Lt. Al Jones, his copilot Lt. John Meyer, and a patrol squadron flight crew that was aboard our plane as passengers. There were seven primary flight crew members and 31 additional passengers on board.

The Sun had set long before, and Fred and I had watched the Moon descend below the clearly defined horizon. This is always a dramatic sight.

With all going routinely, I was lazily scanning outside the aircraft through the large windshields. Even though there was little air traffic in that area, there was always the possibility that we might come close to an airliner on a trans-Atlantic trip.

That's when I noticed a glow that appeared to be on the surface of the ocean. It was more of a yellow-orange glow than anything one could describe more specifically, and I thought it must be 35 or 40 miles ahead and slightly to the right of us.

Estimating distances at night is very difficult, so these are rough approximations. However, I had much experience in sea planes equipped with radar to find submarines. We always practiced judging the distance of vessels, and then crosschecking with the radar. After a while, one gets fairly accurate at such estimates.

Then it occurred to me that these could be the lights of a village on the southern tip of Greenland. The size of the appearance was very large, much like that of a city seen at night from a distance, but I knew there were no cities in Greenland. This possibility alarmed me, because our desired track was well to

the south of Greenland, and if we could see a village ahead, our navigation had gone awry.

We had already passed over a weather ship whose position was known, and we were on track at that time, so the Greenland explanation seemed unlikely. Nevertheless, I told Fred about the glow, and he began studying them with care. He agreed that they appeared to be on the surface.

We Call The Navigator

Our puzzled inspection of the orange-yellow glow continued, and we called the navigator, Lieutenant Noel Koger, to confirm our position and to observe the glow. By that time about eight or ten minutes had elapsed since I first saw the glow. We were only making about 120 knots ground speed, two miles per minute, so the length of time it was taking us to approach the glow confirmed my earlier guess about the distance to the glow when it was first seen.

As we drew closer, the glowing area became defined as a very large circle of lights. The lights became more defined and the diameter of the set of lights grew. In other words, the general appearance changed as one would expect if we were looking at and approaching physical objects on the surface of the water.

The navigator said that we were on the correct track, and that there were no known ships in the area, which was not close to the standard shipping lanes. Fred called the weather ship, and they verified that they knew of no ships in the vicinity.

Originally, the glow was almost directly ahead of the airplane. As we drew closer, it gradually shifted to the right, until it appeared to be about 30 degrees to the right of our nose, and we had to look down on it at about a 45 degree angle. The lights had taken on a definitely circular pattern and were now bright white.

The UFO Approaches

Suddenly, the lights went out. After a minute or two, in their place was a circular yellow halo on the water. Then it turned orange, then to a fiery red, and began moving toward us with great speed, with the color becoming a bluish red around the perimeter. It was coming right at us, and we thought our airplane would be engulfed.

The navigator was so frightened and astonished by the onrushing UFO that he lost his balance, and fell and struck his head against the navigation table. The radioman's arm was hurt during the melee.

The trajectory of the UFO was toward us and upward, and I disconnected the autopilot in contemplation of avoiding a collision by diving the airplane under it. I never made a drastic maneuver, and probably only lost about 50 feet of altitude, because at that instant the UFO stopped its movement toward us and began keeping pace in a fixed position relative to our airplane. It was now about 45 degrees off the nose of the airplane to the right, perhaps 200 feet below our altitude, and appeared to be only several hundred feet in front of us. It had a definite tilt of about 25 degrees from the horizontal. It was so large that it took up most of the right hand windshield.

Throughout this sighting, none of the appearances, meaning the original lights and then the object, was ever seen above the horizon. They were always below the horizon, and when in close it was obviously below us, which also visually put it below the horizon.

It stayed in this position for a minute or so. It appeared to be 300 feet in diameter, metallic like anodized aluminum, shaped like a saucer, a purple-red fiery ring around the perimeter with a frosted white glow around the entire object. The purple-red glow around the perimeter was the same type of glow produced around the commutator of an auto generator when seen in the dark.

Then the object moved away from us. It made no turns, as though it was backing up about 170 degrees from the direction that it approached us, and was still tilted. In only a few seconds it was out of sight.

All of our cameras were within reach, but no one was calm enough to think about taking a picture. Of course, in those days there was no film "fast" enough to photograph anything at night. We were intently wondering what it was. Our impression was that this was a controlled craft.

Witnesses In The Cabin

Al Jones and his copilot switched places with me. I stood behind Al, and watched while he turned the airplane toward the object. Then I went aft into the cabin and learned that most of the passengers had observed the same thing through the cabin windows.

One of the passengers was a Navy Commander and a medical officer and psychiatrist, and I asked him if he had observed the object. He replied that he had, but that he did not really look at it because it was a flying saucer...and he did not believe in such things! I know he was making a joke, but it was a joke based on the climate of ridicule that was so widespread in those days. The doctor did not want to touch this "politically incorrect" topic.

I went back to the cockpit and advised Jones and Kingdon to keep quiet about what we observed because it might have been our first sighting of a flying saucer. During those years when you claimed such a sighting, you were presumed crazy. Lieutenant Jones told me it was too late. He had just reported the object on the radio to Air Traffic Control in Newfoundland, and asked if the object could be tracked by radar. He received no reply to that question, but was told years later that they had seen it on radar.

It turned out that Al Jones had disconnected the autopilot again, and turned the airplane toward the object, trying to get a better look as it sped away. He said that it was tilted at an angle, and then leveled out before it went past the horizon and out of sight. This is an important point. The object did not go into the horizon or down to the horizon. Instead, according to the two pilots who were watching it move away, it appeared to continue to climb, and was lost from sight well above the horizon.

When we landed at Argentia, we were met by intelligence officers who conducted a superficial interrogation, and then released us. Later that day, upon arrival at our home base at Patuxent River, Maryland, we wrote summaries of the incident. The "climate of ridicule" I spoke of earlier colored the content of our reports. We were obliged to tell the facts, but all of us felt it best to keep the reports to a bare minimum, and some of the more provocative events were left out.

The Spinning Compass

For example, I initially had disconnected the autopilot in order to avoid colliding with the object. My intention was to fly under it. When it became obvious that we would not collide, because the object had stopped moving toward us, I reconnected the autopilot. In those "antique" airplanes, every autopilot engagement had to be coordinated with the magnetic heading of the airplane. This was done by referring to the magnetic compass, which was located on the frame separating the two cockpit windows. This is just like compasses sold for use in automobiles, consisting of a circular "needle" immersed in a transparent fluid. The fluid provides some dampening so that the needle movement is slow and steady, and relatively unaffected by turbulence. It is completely independent of all other aircraft systems.

I glanced up to note our magnetic heading, and saw that the compass was rocking back and forth. This is most unusual. I mentioned it to Lt. Kingdon, and he said, "You should have seen it when the object was close. The compass was spinning!"

We looked at our radio direction finders, which are essentially low frequency radio receivers. A ground station is tuned in, and needles point to the

relative bearing of the radio transmitter. The needles were jumping all over the place. We had another compass system which used magnetic compasses located near the wing tips. That was spinning. Finally, we had a vacuum-driven compass system. Alone among our direction finding instruments, this was steady, and we used it to calibrate the autopilot. I conclude from this that the object had a very strong magnetic field, perhaps pulsing. The instruments returned to normal after the object left our vicinity.

Lt. Jones recalls hearing me and Lt. Kingdon discussing the spinning compass.

None of these observations about the directional instruments were made on paper or verbally. In retrospect, this was a mistake. Given our fear of being thought crazy, it is understandable. But the result is that the written record we left was incomplete.

Testimony of Albert Jones

I have kept in touch with Al Jones, who was the pilot in command of our flight, and he knew that I was in the process of putting the story of our UFO encounter on paper. So when I offered to pay him a visit at his retirement home in the West, and to tape record his recollections of the event, he readily agreed. What follows is a transcript of his comments, made on August 10, 1998, and in a follow-up interview conducted on August 31, 1998.

"My crew and I had flown from Patuxent River to Port Lyautey in French Morocco, took off out of there for London, and from London to Iceland where we picked up a relief crew consisting of Lt. Kingdon, Lt. Bethune and Lt. Koger. Our crew proceeded to go to the back of the aircraft and visit with the passengers. We had a lot of passengers, including a medical officer from Bethesda Naval Hospital on board. That's where we were at the time of the encounter, in the cabin of the airplane. None of the original crew was up front.

"My crew and I were in the back of the aircraft visiting with some of the passengers. There was a little commotion. Some of them were looking out the starboard (right) side of the aircraft. People were looking out at things, and I really didn't know what they were looking at. Somebody from the cockpit came back. It might have been the radioman. I can't recall. I looked out of the cabin window and I got a fleeting glimpse of something under the right wing. It was moving forward.

"When you are standing up in the plane and looking down through the windows, you are looking down at everything, you're not looking straight out. I

went over to the window briefly, and I saw a bright object out to the right, maybe a little bit forward of the aircraft, about 60 degrees relative to the aircraft. And I ran up forward to the cockpit.

"When I got up in the cockpit, Lt. Bethune got out of his seat, and I got in. Kingdon was in the right seat, and Koger was in the navigator's seat to the right and down behind the copilot's seat. This object to our right was at about 45 degrees relative to our position, and slightly below. What amazed me was that when it would go from one position to another it wouldn't go like an airplane, it wouldn't lower the right wing to turn right, instead it would just move. It did this a little, and in the meantime it started moving forward of us. I took the aircraft off the autopilot and turned toward the object so that we could all get a better view.

"With that the object really took off, speeded up. It went over the horizon. We could see the silhouette of it going over the horizon on an angle. It wasn't level, the 'wings' weren't level, it was in a bank and went over the horizon in three and a half or four minutes. While it was doing that I radioed Newfoundland base command and asked them if they had anything. They asked that I describe it, and I said it was an object bigger than we are, much faster. We were on a heading of approximately 225 degrees True, and it was on a true heading of about 270, rapidly disappearing over the horizon.

"They never came back and said whether they saw it or not on radar. It wasn't until years later that I found out that they did see it on their radar. When we got into Argentina, the intelligence people were there and separated everyone and took our statements. We were told not to discuss this, which to my knowledge no one did for many years. It was a very interesting thing. It was very bright and very large. We did not see little green people, or anything like that, but it was an amazing experience.

I was only 27 years old then, but I was one of the senior pilots in the Squadron as far as time in type (of aircraft), with over a hundred crossings over the North Atlantic.

"After we landed in Newfoundland the Air Force conducted the interrogation. It struck me right from the start that they knew a heck of a lot more about this than what they let on. During this interrogation, which was conducted very professionally by the Air Force, I thought everything was fine. The medical officer who had seen the object refused to talk to the Air Force about it, and the Air Force tried to get me, as the aircraft commander, to force him to testify. I declined to press the matter.

"After that, I didn't hear much except within the next two weeks both the Navy and the Air Force pooh-poohed our sighting, saying it was the Moon. Well,

it was not the Moon. It (the UFO) was down below us most of the time. Then they said it was the Aurora Borealis. The Aurora Borealis is above the horizon, we've all seen it dozens or hundreds of times before. And it was insulting to our intelligence and it turned me off. I got to the point where I did not want to discuss this with anyone. My wife to this day is little bit upset because I didn't tell her and the children about it. Well, I didn't think I should.

"I'd love to know more about it myself. I stayed in the Navy a couple more years, until 1953 on active duty, and I didn't see anything more like that. But it was an interesting experience.

"About a year after this incident I had a VIP trip to Korea with Secretary of the Navy Dan Kimball. In Honolulu they briefed us on some things, and they asked me specifically, wasn't I on that North Atlantic trip a year before that saw something? I said, no. And I didn't know whether I was supposed to get involved with it or not. So I never gave them a straight answer.

"So there were people in the Navy that were on that, they never forgot it. They were monitoring things. I felt that if they wanted to know something, they could have done it officially, and not done it in a casual way with four or five enlisted crew members there listening. I just thought it was the time to be discreet. Well, I still feel that way.

"I got out of the Navy in 1953, and I got into corporate aviation and flew there until 1996. I have 26,000 hours of flight time. And I've seen the Aurora Borealis, and every time I see it I smile when I think about the people who ridiculed us, talking about, 'What do you know about this?' and 'What do you know about the Moon?' and all that. We had a whole lot of people who were well experienced and wouldn't stretch the truth for anything. So it was insulting at the time, some of the comments that were made.

"And the Navy came out with an observation the following week that it could have been a high altitude observation balloon. Because when you send one up, it might be dark, but they get up to 30,000 feet or so and the Sun reflects off them. But I said, there's no balloon that moves like that sucker did, you can't see the silhouette of one going over the horizon!"

Bethune asks: "Would you have an estimate, when you were in the back of the airplane, how far you thought it was away from us?" Jones: "It wasn't very far. When you're standing up there, and you're looking down at an angle, the downward angle was probably a 20 or 25 degree angle, I think it was less than a mile away at that time. By the time I got up forward, it was starting to go straight West and starting to pick up speed. So I didn't get to see it very long."

Bethune asks: "Do you remember if you saw it under the wing, or on top of the wing (when you were in the cabin)?" Jones: "It was down. It had to be under the wing, because when you're back in the fuselage, the wing is forward. Where I was, you could look down, and as it moved forward it went off the wingtip, just below it. Looking at it, as I remember, you looked through the window down past the wingtip and it was just slightly under that. Then it disappeared, and I disappeared. I walked (up to the cockpit). When I was walking, it was going!"

These follow-up questions were asked in the second interview:

Q: When you first saw the object, was the window through which you were looking located behind the wing?

A: Yes, because I was all the way in the back of the airplane, near the galley. That's where the medical officer was.

Q: When you observed the object through the cabin window, was it moving relative to the wing?

A: It was moving forward, yes, and I think that if I had stopped and looked at it, it would have disappeared completely by going forward, under the wing. Because by the time I got to the cockpit, it was about 60 degrees relative bearing. We were on a true course of about 225, with 24 degrees westerly variation, so our heading was about 249 or 250 degrees.

Q: On this initial heading of 250 degrees, how many degrees did you have to turn to chase the object?

A: Initially, 25 or 30 degrees, because as it pulled away, of course, the relative bearing, its relation to us, diminished. So I may have turned to the right to 270 degrees and turned back to 260 degrees as it kept on going. I kept the airplane off the autopilot for a while.

Q: Back to the cabin. You were able to see the wing clearly enough so that you could say the object is here or there with respect to the wing?

A: Not really, because the wing was dark, and the object itself was bright. So you see the object with the shadow of our starboard wing. The wing of course was not lit up. The navigation lights were not visible from that position.

Q: Was the object moving when you were looking at it?

A: Yes, it was.

Q: From the cabin?

A: Yes sir, it was moving.

Q: Did it have a shape?

A: I did not see a shape at that time, all I saw was this big bright thing out there. And I couldn't really pick up a shape to it at that time. Now, when I got in the cockpit, I did.

Q: So you went up to the cockpit. You said the object was in a bank, but you can't remember if it was a left or right bank?

A: When I saw it from the back, I didn't see any bank, I just saw a bright light. But when I went forward, yes, it was in a bank. And when it went over the horizon it was in a bank.

Q: did the bank angle change?

A: I think maybe it diminished, as it was going away.

Q: What was your reaction to the official reception of your report?

A: I got fed up with it in a big hurry, both at Argentia and after we got to Patuxent River. We went from Argentia down to Quonset Point and then to Pax River. Because people would look at us and say, "Oh, it was the damned Moon." I'd been across the pond 80 times and no, it was not the Moon! The Moon doesn't come up and fly alongside you, and you can't see an outline of it over the horizon.

Well, then it was the Aurora Borealis. No, I've seen the Aurora Borealis many times, and it was not that. And the discrediting they went through, with the Navy. The Navy, the following Monday I believe it was, had an article in the *Washington Post* about a big balloon. And they set it off someplace in Minnesota, and they set it off at sunset, or shortly after sunset so that it was dark, and as it went up it caught the rays of the sun. And people saw this big object up there.

So the whole thing turned me off. Plus the fact that people said do not discuss this thing, and I did not. Never talked with my wife or my children, and not for many, many years.

Q: (The Philip Klass explanation for the sighting was explained in some detail to Commander Jones, with emphasis on the fact that the direction of the Moon coincided approximately with the direction in which the object was last seen. Jones had not been aware of this.)

A: I can appreciate that. If the Moon indeed was to the West, I can see where that could happen. But you couldn't see it out of the cabin, and it wouldn't be tucked under the right wing. I don't think it could possibly be the Moon, because we saw the silhouette of it as it went over the horizon.

Q: As it went over the horizon, could you see the horizon?

A: Yes, sir. You could see the horizon because this thing was bright. And as it went forward, and when it went over the horizon, we couldn't see it any more. First of all, take into consideration the difference in speeds. Our true air speed was 118-120 knots. We had a hellish headwind. I don't know how far you can see from 10,000 feet, but I'm sure you can see a good 60 miles. And if it goes over that in four minutes, it has to be going 1,500 miles per hour. (Comment: The distance to the horizon is in fact 123 miles when the observer is at an altitude of 10,000 feet. Thus the Jones speed estimate should be doubled.)

Q: Was there a cirrus cloud layer or any other cloud layer you recall?

A: None.

Q: Do you recall any discussion about the magnetic compass spinning?

A: Yes, Kingdon and Bethune talked about that. I did not see the compass spinning, but I remember them talking about it.

Written Reports

When we arrived at our home base, we were asked to make individual written reports on the UFO incident. These were in the form of a memorandum for our Commanding Officer. There was no interrogation or debriefing. We assumed that the reports would go to Naval Intelligence, but had no idea what would happen next. As it turned out, we heard nothing further after we submitted our summaries.

It is important to note that had there been a serious attempt to gather every detail of our experience, such as by systematic interrogation of all the witnesses, the record would be quite a bit different from what you are about to read. This is because we had agreed early on not to go into detail unless details were demanded. So the following accounts, including mine, are the "bare bones"

essentials. In reviewing what I wrote then, I am embarrassed by the lack of pertinent detail. I did a really bad job!

The reader should also keep in mind that each individual had only part of the "big picture," and is reporting only that portion he experienced. For example, I was the first witness, and then Kingdon began looking at the glow. Then Jones and Meyer came forward and I went back to the cabin. Koger only saw part of it. It wasn't exactly a "musical chairs" situation, but only Fred Kingdon saw the entire evolution from start to finish. Several witnesses saw the UFO only from the cabin, and so on. When I went back to the cabin, everybody was bunched up on the right side of the airplane, so it may be that each of the 31 passengers also saw the object, although they did not make reports. The passengers I talked to described a "fiery ring."

Our reports were included in an analysis prepared by the U.S. Air Force under "Project Twinkle," a fore-runner of Project Bluebook. I copied the file from a microfilm at the National Archives in Washington, D.C.

Recall that Kingdon and I were intently focused on the anomalous sight ahead of us. We were not looking back into the rear of the airplane. Of specific interest is Koger's statement that he was reporting the 0050Z position to us. That does not mean he arrived and saw the object at 0050Z, but only that he was reporting our position as of that time. Navigators always report where the aircraft was at some time -- often as much as ten minutes -- in the past. If Koger's recollection is correct, he was at his navigator's station in the rear of the cockpit working out the data and plotting the 0050Z fix. Assuming this was a celestial three-star fix, that work would have taken him at least five minutes.

Remember that these were the days before "instant" navigation computers. Koger had to use a sextant and take fixes based on celestial navigation, or visual sighting of "guard" ships, or the like. So the events Koger relates took place at some time after 0050Z, and perhaps as much as ten minutes after that time. By common agreement after the fact, we had decided the sighting must have begun to occur at about 0055Z. But nobody looked at a clock and made a note.

The only time that is probably reliable, in the sense that someone looked at a clock and made a note, is the time at which a radio call was made by Lt. Jones to Air Traffic Control, 0104Z. Apparently this call was made immediately after the object was lost from sight.

The reason for dwelling on the time when these events occurred will become apparent when we consider the skeptical explanations for our experience.

The following comments refer to the appended copies of the original reports made by the crew to their Commanding Officer.

Lt. Bethune's report conforms with the rest of this narration, except of course for all the additional detail I have furnished in this essay.

Lt. Kingdon's report is the most comprehensive, and confirms the other witness accounts.

Lt. Koger's report makes it clear that at first he thought Kingdon and Bethune were looking at a display of Northern Lights, but then he describes the appearance in terms that could not be either Northern Lights or the Moon. Koger saw it as a well-defined shape with extraordinary coloring and movement: "The best view I had of the object showed it to be a circular, bright orange-red disc, which was approaching us at a very great, undeterminable speed." Note also that Koger went back to get the Aircraft Commander, Lt. Jones, and that when he tried to get back in the cockpit it was so full of men observing the UFO that he could not get in.

Lt. Jones also confirms the other witness accounts. Note that he was alerted to the UFO by the navigator, and apparently both the navigator and Lt. Jones must have watched it through a cabin window before Jones came forward to the cockpit. Also, some time elapsed while Jones was being notified and then observed the UFO, and finally went up to the cockpit.

Lt. Meyer's account is very short and he admits that he saw only the very end of the display. His comment that "...my first impression was the celestial setting of the moon and the fact that stratus layers were present to cause the bright red glow and the halo effect..." would be taken up later by Philip Klass in his skeptical interpretation of the sighting. Meyer is the only pilot to report a stratus layer of clouds, the others stating that there was no such cloud layer during the latter parts of the event.

Chief Radioman Quentin Shiever adds little to the account, except for his description of a "round object the color of fire." Note that he was viewing the object through a cabin window.

The last report we have is from Aviation Electrician Third Class Gerald Daniels, another enlisted man who by chance went to the cockpit during the sighting, but just before Lt. Jones came forward to switch seats with Lt. Bethune. "It looked very much like an eclipse of the sun, which was about three-fourths of total eclipse, in size, shape and color, but the speed of the light must have been at least 520 knots if not more." Presumably the color he is trying to convey is that of the sun, glowing yellow. The "three-fourths of total eclipse" conforms with the appearance, elsewhere called a "horseshoe," of the UFO at some points during the observation. The obvious speed of the UFO relative to the airplane is also an important feature confirmed by this witness.

Radioman M. E. Reed was another witness in the cockpit. He was manning the radio operator's station, located behind the left pilot's seat. Unfortunately, there is no record of his account.

The key pilot personnel who saw the UFO are all on record, as are two other witnesses. Though not very detailed, their accounts are remarkably consistent. There were almost certainly many more witnesses, and it is unfortunate that their testimony was not solicited. Locating them at this late date, 47 years after the event, would be impossible. Lt. Kingdon died in the late 1970s.

Consistencies in the independent accounts of the pilots who were in the cockpit include an estimated size of 200 to 300 feet in diameter, a fiery color, and a speed ranging from 1,000 to 1,500 miles per hour.

The following 17 pages comprise the Project Twinkle documentation of our encounter.

The Air Force Explanation

The incident took place in the early morning hours of Greenwich or "Z" time. Civilian aviation and most military operations use Greenwich Mean Time in order to have a universal time, rather than having to constantly add and subtract hours to yield the local time. The sighting must have taken place around 0055Z.

and thereafter, meaning 55 minutes after midnight at Greenwich, England. We were at about 50 degrees West Longitude, so our "local" time would be three hours and 20 minutes earlier than the GMT time, or 9:35 p.m., February 9, 1951. The GMT date was February 10, 1951, and the sun had long since set.

Whether you are in an airplane, or on a ship, or standing on land in the northern latitudes, you are likely to see the Northern Lights or Aurora Borealis, especially in winter. Of the four pilots and the navigator, only Lt. Meyer was new to this part of the world, and thus to the Northern Lights. The rest of us had seen the phenomenon hours on end. It normally appears as rolling sheets of a faint white light, sometimes becoming pink or even in rare instances multi-colored. These sheets of light move and flow rapidly, presenting a strange sight.

The aviation weather reports and forecasts always included comments about the likelihood of Northern Lights. Ours had no such comment, and the weather ship that we flew near did not mention Northern Lights when they updated our forecast.

I have never seen a display that formed an integral, discrete shape such as a circle, nor have I ever heard of that kind of evolution of Northern Lights. That is why none of these experienced north-Atlantic aviators gave the slightest thought to Northern Lights as the cause of our sighting. But the Air Force did, giving this not just some thought, but writing off our experience with that explanation!

On February 14, Colonel Harold E. Watson, the Air Force Intelligence Department Chief, sent a message to a staff member as follows:

"Request that you give me a short resume of action taken in connection with the inclosed cables concerning an unidentified object in the general vicinity of Newfoundland." He was referring to cables sent to Air Force intelligence headquarters by the Air Force officers who debriefed us at Argentia about our sighting. It may also be that he had copies of the reports we prepared for the Commanding Officer of our squadron.

The reply came from Lt. Colonel Kent Parrot, Chief, Aircraft & Propulsion Section, Technical Analysis Division, Intelligence Department. It was dated February 20, only ten days after our sighting.

"1. The inclosed cables were reviewed by this office in light of criteria which has been developed up to the present time in the investigation of such incidents. The matter was also discussed with an astronomer attached to the Graduate Center at Area B.

"2. As a result, it was concluded that while there is a possibility of the object being a meteor or a fireball, the description furnished gives reason to believe that the aircrew actually saw an unusual 'northern lights' display."

Given the facts in this matter, the Air Force "explanation" is plainly preposterous. Every particular of the multiple witness event makes either the "meteor or fireball" or the Northern Lights explanations impossible. Yet there it is. The reader should understand that in the statistics kept by the Air Force during its many years of UFO investigation, our sighting falls into the "explained" category.

Colonel Watson and his staff had the excellent summary of our sighting prepared by Air Force Captain Paulsen. This is included in the "Written Reports" section. It seems impossible that Paulsen's summary was consulted by Watson. Here is what Paulsen said in the report he made immediately after interviewing us: "No unusual meteorological activity known to exist and having any influence on the sighting. This object could not have been a comet as the object was below and between the aircraft and ocean." Nor was there further follow-up questioning of the witnesses as recommended by Paulsen.

Another issue that has never been resolved is whether the UFO was seen on radar. In 1951 the radar systems were much weaker and covered much less area than they did even a few years later with the advent of the DEW Line. However, there was a radar installation at Gander, Newfoundland, and there exists the possibility that the UFO was picked up on that radar. Both Lt. Kingdon and I were told by an officer at Argentia who was a duty officer when Capt. Paulsen interviewed us that the UFO had been tracked on radar, but we never saw documentation supporting that statement.

The Klass Explanation

Writing many years later, basing his research on the written reports we submitted to our squadron, UFO debunker Philip Klass produced another explanation. It is entirely different from that concocted by the Air Force, and it relies on astronomy.

Oddly, the professional astronomer consulted by Lt. Col. Parrot missed what Klass says he found. The astronomer was probably Professor J. Allen Hynek, who in later years became a staunch supporter of the idea that UFOs are a real, independent phenomenon. In his early years as an Air Force consultant, by his own admission Hynek simply wrote off UFO reports without giving them any serious thought.

In his book *UFOs Explained*, Klass proposed that we had seen the Moon reflected off clouds. His explanation is interesting, and has a surface plausibility.

Klass found that at the location and time of our sighting the Moon had just set. At exactly 0055Z the top tip of the Moon, could have been seen. Moreover, the direction of the Moon from us was about 280 degrees True, and our airplane had a heading of about 230 degrees True. Klass quotes our reports to the effect that the UFO maintained a relative angle of about 60 degrees to the right, which would be quite close to the position of the Moon.

Because this is the only well articulated explanation for our sighting, it deserves a detailed response.

A careful examination of Klass's discussion of the position of the Moon shows that he is talking about the top point of the Moon, not the entire orb. And only one-seventh of the Moon was illuminated, forming a thin vertical "banana" sliver shape. So at 0055Z the very tip of the sliver would momentarily be in view, then disappear, as the Moon rapidly descended below the horizon.

Earlier we discussed the fact that this sighting was actually lengthy, probably at least eight minutes in duration. It was not a single sighting, but a series of sightings by various people over time. What Kingdon and I saw was not what Jones or the Navigator saw, and so forth. All of us saw pieces of this continuing drama, and no single observer saw it from start to finish. Assuming that the first sighting occurred at or even slightly before 0055Z, what are we to say about the events that followed? They would include two pilots getting out of their seats and being replaced by two other pilots, who then tried to chase the "Moon."

Unless our estimate of 0055Z is totally wrong, much of the action took place long after the Moon was far below the horizon, thus making the Klass explanation impossible. Klass had available to him the Air Intelligence Information Report prepared on March 12, 1951 by Air Force intelligence officials. Presumably, this was prepared based on the interviews at Argentia, which were done immediately after we landed and had small details like the time of the sighting fresh in our minds. It states plainly: "Sighted at 0055Z on 10 February 1951 and remained visible for approximately 7 or 8 minutes." Our written reports, dated the same day, give the same time for the beginning of the events.

Klass has the relative bearing of the Moon at 60 degrees to our right throughout the incident. This is a fair interpretation of our written reports, but it is not the way it happened. Initially, the lights Lt. Kingdon and I saw on the surface were almost straight in front of the airplane. The UFO then moved toward us, upward and off the right side, forming a relative bearing of about 60 degrees. In other words, although this fact is not conveyed in the compressed accounts of our written reports, the relative bearing of the object varied a great

deal, from zero to 60 degrees -- with the airplane's heading held steady by the autopilot.

Ironically, Klass quotes the descriptions of the UFO, which include "huge fiery orange disk on its edge," "definitely circular and reddish orange on its perimeter," "circular, bright orange-red disk," "round object...with color of fire," "It looked very much like an eclipse of the sun, which was about three fourths of total eclipse, in size, shape and color," and finally, "...bright red glow and the halo effect...". Klass never tells us how the 1/7th sliver of the Moon could, even if it was visible, possibly account for these descriptions. These descriptions sound possibly like the appearance of the *Sun* as it sets, but have no conceivable connection with the Moon.

None of the witness reports has the object vertically oriented. But if the 1/7 Moon was what we were seeing, it would have been vertical. Klass is unable to furnish an explanation for the 90 degree rotation of the Moon's image.

He writes as follows: "So the crew should have been able to see this tip of the moon at 00:55 GMT at approximately the same bearing at which they thought they saw the UFO. By shortly after 01:00 GMT, when the UFO suddenly seemed to zoom over the horizon and disappear, the moon would have dipped sufficiently below the horizon so that it would no longer be visible to the crew. Thus the disappearance of the UFO corresponded closely to the time of 'disappearance' of the moon. If the UFO and the upper limb of the moon were not one and the same, it seems strange that not a single crew member, in the original reports, mentioned seeing the moon, or said that the UFO was observed to be close to the moon."

Here Klass tries to gloss the fact that after 0055Z no part of the Moon would be visible. It is not "by shortly after 0100 GMT" that the Moon would become invisible, but within seconds after 0055 GMT, five minutes earlier.

As to why "not a single crew member...mentioned seeing the moon," the reason is obvious -- the Moon had already set. Lt. Kingdon and I sat there and watched it set. We did not include that in our reports because it was completely irrelevant.

Finally, Klass fails to provide a rationale for the optics involved in his explanation. At one point in his lengthy chapter devoted to our sighting, he talks about a "sub-Moon," by which he means the reflection of the Moon on clouds. In the same breath, he admits that for a "sub-Moon" to exist, the Moon must be at a substantial angle above the horizon, something obviously missing here. So he walks away from the "sub-Moon," but manages to avoid dealing with those aspects of the reports in which observers emphatically say they were looking *down* at the object, at some times looking down at a very steep 45 degree angle.

It is unfortunate that Klass did nothing to contact me or the other witnesses. Nor did he put any faith in the article published by NICAP, which went into much more detail. I was interviewed in depth by Stuart Nixon for that article, and it contains no major errors. But this was dismissed by Klass as "ten-year old memories," presumably twisted by time.

I finally met Klass at the 1996 MUFON Symposium in Greensboro, North Carolina. He noticed my name tag and eventually connected me with the North Atlantic UFO case. Then he proceeded to lecture me about what we had *really* seen! What hurt is that when he was writing his book, Klass could very easily have contacted the witnesses for details, but chose instead to rely on their extremely compressed written accounts. A key witness, Fred Kingdon, was still alive then. Instead, Klass engaged in armchair theorizing. I have often thought that he could use an hour or two in the cockpit of an airplane over the North Atlantic, watching the real Moon and stars, instead of those he conjures up in the warm safety of his office.

In sum, neither the Air Force explanation nor the Klass explanation hold up, unless we are ready to willfully ignore major elements of testimony, given immediately after the event by the multiple witnesses.

At the risk of speculating, I would suggest that the witness reports are consistent with an extended encounter with a large disc shaped object with a dome. The rim and flat surface of the disc was brightly glowing with varying colors. The dome was for the most part not illuminated, and at times obscured the glowing portions, thus presenting a "horseshoe" appearance.

Skyhooks

Look magazine for February 27, 1951 was on the stands when we got back from the trip where we had our UFO encounter. They were already writing articles telling us what we were *going* to be seeing! The story presented the Skyhook balloon as the cause of all the flying saucer reports.

Later I discovered that the key photograph used to illustrate the article was actually staged, either by anchoring the balloon to the deck of an aircraft carrier, then taking a picture from an airplane flying over it, or by doing the same thing at the launching facility at Minneapolis. Only then could they produce a picture that appeared to be totally round and sufficiently "saucer-like" to be convincing. From almost any other vantage point, the balloons appeared to be shaped like a huge ice cream cone. Nor did the Skyhooks have lights on them, thus ruling them out as the cause of many important sightings. We spotted a number of them, and always knew at once what they were. In fact, pilots were normally advised in advance of these launchings, and at times we were asked to help locate the balloons.

So it appeared that the government was debunking the UFO sightings in advance. There had been many sightings in the north Atlantic, where I did much of my flying. The airlines were sighting them, and the Icelanders and the Canadians all were reporting sightings. And whatever these people were seeing, it was *not* Skyhook balloons.

I can state with certainty that the UFO sightings in the north Atlantic were many, and that they described objects appearing and acting in a manner totally different from any balloon. The reason I know about these sightings is that I took part in a series of meetings with authorities in Iceland during which the topic was raised. In addition to the Icelanders, most of the people we met were from Lockheed Overseas, Inc., the contractor who ran the airport.

Meetings In Iceland

The simple fact is that the number and quality of UFO sightings rose to such a high level during 1950 that the government of Iceland urgently requested military aid from the United States. What we today know as UFOs were interpreted by the Icelandic government as experimental Soviet bombers, mainly because our government was promoting that explanation. The performance characteristics of the UFOs made the situation seem very grave. Our government agreed.

How the Soviet craft were reaching Iceland and points well to the west, even approaching the Canadian coast, and how they managed to evade and out-fly feeble attempts at interception, were profoundly puzzling and disturbing issues. But we were in the depths of the Cold War, and the conclusion that these were terrestrial craft operated by the belligerent Soviet Union was warranted.

A build-up of American forces in Iceland was decreed, along with provision of much military equipment. Because we were experts in military air transport of personnel and materiel, with much experience on the north Atlantic routes, in February 1951 Fred Kingdon and I were sent to do preliminary liaison work. Our job was to examine all the air facilities and to make recommendations for augmenting them as necessary in order to permit an orderly transfer of men and supplies. So ours was a pathfinder job. Although our task was rather narrowly focused, we very soon found out the vital *why* of our mission. This we were told by the Icelanders, not by the Naval officials who sent us.

In retrospect, and with the particular hind-sight that comes from a spectacular UFO encounter such as we experienced, it is obvious that the Soviet Union had nothing to do with the wave of UFOs penetrating the north Atlantic air space. But at the time almost nobody thought in terms of extraterrestrial craft.

The mission that occupied Fred Kingdon and me was secret. We knew from our briefings that there were diplomatic problems as well as the fundamental issue of preparing for what appeared to be a military move against Iceland by the Russians. In any event, that is what we were doing in Keflavik, Iceland, and what we heard there.

Soon after our visit to Iceland, and our favorable report about the ability of the existing facilities to accomodate our aircraft, beginning May 6, 1951 we flew troops to the island in waves of 12 airplanes at a time, staging out of Argentina, Newfoundland.

Many years later, when the story of our UFO encounter was published, Fred Kingdon upbraided me for speaking in public about it. This was because he still remembered the extremely sensitive nature of our Iceland mission, and thought talking about the UFO incident would somehow breach that confidence. In 1970 he had contacted Naval Intelligence and asked about the security classification status of our mission to Iceland. He was told it was still secret. Fred mistakenly assumed that the UFO sighting was similarly classified and bound together with the liaison mission. It was not until 1985 that the UFO encounter was finally declassified by the Navy.

Visit From Intelligence

The intelligence officer came to my house in May of 1951. I got back on the 12th and left again on the 18th, so he must have arrived between those dates. That's one good thing about keeping a log book!

I was on a six day period off duty, and presume that he checked with my squadron to find out when I would be available for an interview, because my wife says he never came before or after. When I say "off duty," I mean not flying. I was kept busy as the assistant maintenance officer of the squadron.

He came unannounced, and just knocked on the door. He simply introduced himself as a naval intelligence officer, showed some credentials, and asked if he could discuss the sighting. Of course, I said yes.

From time to time FBI and other civilian officials would stop by because my name was often given as a reference for Naval officers who were having their security clearances upgraded. So his appearance at the door was no great surprise. He was neatly dressed in a suit and tie, and appeared to be a young man just like the rest of my colleagues, except for his civilian clothes. This was *not* a Man In Black!

He said that he wanted to discuss my "encounter" with a flying saucer. I recall his use of the word encounter, because it sounded a bit strange, and because

he used it throughout our interview instead of "sighting." My wife had been in and out of the room, but had managed to hear most of the discussion. Later she said it was her opinion that the man wasn't there strictly because he was forced to as a duty, but that he seemed genuinely interested in the phenomenon.

He had a binder holding photographs of UFOs interspersed with what seemed to be printed material. As he listened to my story, he was writing on a note pad and thumbing through the binder. Occasionally he would stop at a photograph and show it to me, asking if it looked like my UFO. Together we looked at a number of those pictures, trying to find one that appeared to be the same as the object I had seen.

One photograph seemed a good representation of the UFO we had encountered, and it was noted as being 30 feet in diameter, as I recall. When he gave me that dimension, I told him it was much too small. So he went to another picture that was marked as having a diameter of 100 feet, and asked, "Did this look like what you saw?" As I went through the details of my encounter over the Atlantic a few months earlier, he listened with keen attention, and took copious notes. I recall telling him that the color of the lights on the rim of the object I had seen could best be compared to the color of the electrical discharge of the commutator on an automobile generator when seen in the dark.

Many of us on the flight had written reports for our Navy superiors, and the Air Force had interviewed us upon arrival at Argentia, and almost certainly had generated its own report. Later, when I was interviewed by the intelligence officer at my home, I asked where these reports ended up. He replied that they would first go to a committee of 12 men who would screen them for "national security impact." If it was found to have such impact, it would never be sent elsewhere. Cases where no such impact was found by this committee were sent to the Air Force or Navy offices handling ordinary UFO cases. Apparently our encounter was not considered to have such national security implications.

When he was getting ready to leave, he pulled out a magazine and opened it to a page where an article began. He said something like, "I think you'll find this interesting." Then he gave me the magazine, and left. I never heard from the intelligence officer again.

I want to emphasize that the visit was pleasant in all respects, and that the intelligence officer never told me to keep quiet about my encounter or tried to "sell" me on anything. He seemed genuinely interested in my case and in the general topic of UFOs.

I still have the magazine. It was *Pageant* magazine for October 1950, and it contained an article called "Flying Saucers" written by Frank Scully. The story

was introduced as "A special 21-page condensation of what's really behind the saucer mystery."

Soon after the appearance in *Pageant* of this article, the book upon which it was based was published as *Behind the Flying Saucers*. Scully detailed the discovery of three crashed flying saucers and the bodies of the 34 alien crew members. The book created a sensation, but many believe it was a hoax. One of Scully's primary sources was a man named Silas Newton.

In 1949 I flew a PBM-5A amphibian to Big Springs, Texas. My airplane was on the tarmac, and I was talking to the pilot of a private airplane parked next to it. He said that he was carrying a Magnetic Anomaly Detector, a device that had been developed by the Navy during WWII for the purpose of detecting submarines. As a submarine passed nearby, the MAD equipment would sense the disruption of the natural magnetic field. The otherwise invisible submarines became a target for bombs and depth charges, thanks to the ingenious magnetic anomaly detectors. The pilot said that the MAD equipment on his airplane was being used to explore for oil. The airplane was a "shark nose" war surplus B-18, with the MAD gear located in the nose.

Soon the owner of the airplane and the MAD gear came by. I was introduced to him, and thus it was that I met a figure who would become famous in the annals of ufology -- Silas Newton, one of Scully's sources for the crashed saucer account.

Why the Navy intelligence officer who visited my home thought so highly of the Scully information still puzzles me. At times I speculate that he knew about another crash, one that took place less than four years before our meeting, near Roswell, New Mexico. Perhaps that was the "message" in the gift of that *Pageant* magazine. Or it may be that Newton had real information about a crashed disk. But I will never know for sure.

About Me

I was born in 1921, became enamored of aviation, and joined the Navy as an Aviation Cadet in the "V-5" program in 1942, along with so many other young men of my generation.

One fellow who was in Navy Cadet pre-flight training at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill with me was George Bush, who later trained in fighters, and was shot down in the Pacific. But he survived that, and went on to become President of the United States. I remember another personality from those days, a man who was all muscles and instructed in our rugged physical training program. His name was Gerald Ford, and he also became President. Ted

Williams, the famous baseball player, was also a cadet there with me. He went on to fly Marine Corps fighters.

By the time I retired from active service with the rank of full Commander, I had "checked out" in over 100 different models of airplanes, including just about every sea plane and transport the Navy had in service over a long span of years. Among other things, I had been assigned to the Naval Air Test Facility at Patuxent River, Maryland, where some of the early astronaut training took place, and was an engineering representative and test pilot for the Navy. I was one of only six Navy pilots specializing in flying VIPs, and flew as pilot for many, including the Secretary of the Navy, the Secretary of the Army, the Secretary of the Brazilian Navy, the Chief of Naval Operations, and the Commandant of the Marine Corps and Admiral McCormick, who succeeded General Eisenhower as Supreme Allied Commander of NATO. Overall, I logged over 10,000 hours of flight time.

During the Korean War I was deeply involved with the Military Air Transport System, which was really a military airline. We ran it just like an airline, and it was a damned good airline. Many of our pilots were reservists called back to duty from their jobs at Pan Am, TWA and other major airlines.

Public History Of This Case

I often thought of the incident, but never discussed it with civilians. Not that I was ever told to keep quiet or threatened in any manner. It was just one of myriad things that happen over the course of a military career that one does not talk about.

But it seems that others were talking about my case, though I had no idea at the time.

During the period 1956 through 1959 I was working for the Bureau of Aeronautics as Engineering Officer and Facilities Officer on their engineering team in Detroit. I had a number of test projects, and at one time flew the target airplane for flight tests of missiles!

My boss was Navy Captain Jim Taylor, a brilliant aeronautical engineer and good friend. We both fancied cigars, and I would bring him a few really good ones when I could pick them up on my travels. One day I was chatting with him about an anti-gravity study contract I had seen. To my great surprise, Taylor said, "I think that's how those things travel." He soon made it plain that he meant those

flying saucers. This emboldened me, and I told him a bit about our encounter over the North Atlantic in 1951.

In 1960 I got a letter from Capt. Taylor. In it he said that he had discussed my sighting with Admiral Fahrney, who had told Major Donald Keyhoe about it, and that I would be hearing from Keyhoe.

Fahrney was the Navy's missile chief at that time, and was in a position to know everything about America's space program and military capabilities. He was also closely associated with Major Keyhoe, having preceded him as Chairman of the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena (NICAP), and was a staunch supporter of Keyhoe's attempts to break the secrecy on UFOs. The Admiral was not shy about telling people he thought UFOs were space craft.

Keyhoe wanted me to go public with my story, and to participate in planned congressional hearings. I declined, seeing no sense in becoming a celebrity and attracting ridicule from the press and possibly from military colleagues.

But Keyhoe did write the story in his 1960 book *Flying Saucers -- Top Secret*, and submitted a summary to the Congress along with much other data showing that the UFO problem was very real, indeed. It was not until 1970 that I learned of the book. I was told about it by Stuart Nixon, who worked closely with Keyhoe on the NICAP publication. Keyhoe was a real gentleman, and used a pseudonym instead of my real name. Nixon visited me at my New Jersey home and interviewed me at length, and then wrote an article that appeared in the September and October 1970 issues of their newsletter. This was really the first time the public had a chance to learn the full details of our encounter.

A number of other publications picked up the NICAP account, mainly copying it. Among these were *Naval Aviation News* (1975), the *Time-Life UFO Phenomena* (1985), *UFOs Explained* (1985) by Philip Klass, and *Above Top Secret* (1985) by Timothy Good. With the exception of Stuart Nixon, no author bothered to contact me, relying instead on previous accounts. But *Above Top Secret* was different in that for the first time my story was associated with my real name. This resulted in a flurry of telephone calls from all over the country. And I was still unaware of any of these books!

When I got Good's book, it immediately became obvious that he had a copy of the original report I had submitted to my Commanding Officer on February 10, 1951. I thought this was deep in a security vault somewhere, but it turned out to have been declassified. So I visited the National Archives and found the complete Project Twinkle report on microfilm, and had a copy made. Reading through that brought back many memories. Oddly, the report shown in

Good's book was different in some minor respects from the "real" report I sent to my Commanding Officer. Although it was released to Good by Naval Intelligence, it contains many misspelled words and is typed on a different typewriter.

Then something happened that really formed the impetus for this essay. I was contacted by the producers of a television program called *Sightings*. They show documentaries on various paranormal topics, and often feature UFOs. My story was so important, they said, that they would fly a crew to see me. This they did, and I spent six and a half hours with a gang of television people. I was able to show them a real R5D, and to sit in the cockpit and reenact the UFO sighting in meticulous detail.

When at last I saw the program, I was stunned. All they had me saying was a few words. And then they went on to state that I had flown a group of scientists and technicians to Iceland because they were seeing strange craft, and that I had determined that these sightings were space ships! So much for *Sightings*, and for television in general.

The real problem with the ridiculously inaccurate *Sightings* show is that other government and military employees with knowledge of the UFO problem were watching. They got back to me and said that they would never go along with any publication of their stories, because they could not trust the media to tell it straight. I can't fault them. Unfortunately, in the intervening years, several have died. We have lost the ability to get their detailed personal accounts.

However, the *Sightings* affair reaffirmed my determination to put the story on paper. If the next writer or TV producer gets it all wrong, it won't be my fault.

Commander Graham E. Bethune
October 14, 1998